

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DUBLIN 00402 01 OF 02 221721Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00
DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 /067 W
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R 221623Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8839
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL BELFAST
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DUBLIN 402

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT EI
SUBJECT: FIANNA FAIL CONVENTION

1. SUMMARY: THE LARGE FIANNA FAIL CONVENTION WAS AN ENTHUSIASTIC, WELL-ORGANIZED, AND SUCCESSFUL GATHERING OF THE PARTY FAITHFUL FOR THEIR ANNUAL LAYING-ON-OF-HANDS. LYNCH DOMINATED, BUT CHARLIE HAUGHEY AND GEORGE COLLEY GOT THEIR TIME IN THE SUN. THE ENTHUSIASM IS BOTH A PLUS AND A MINUS IN THE ELECTION STAKES: IT MASKS A CERTAIN BLURRINESS OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS, BUT IT IS THE FUEL WHICH CLASSICALLY WINS ELECTIONS IN IRELAND. FIANNA FAIL IS STILL THE UNDERDOG, BUT APPEARS TO BE COMING UP IN THE RUNUP TO THE ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE OPPOSITION PARTY, FIANNA FAIL, HELD ITS ANNUAL CONVENTION (ARD-FHEIS) IN DUBLIN FEBRUARY 18-20. IT WAS A LARGE (6500), WELL-ORGANIZED AND ENTHUSIASTIC GATHERING OF THE FAITHFUL. THE ATTENDANT PUBLICITY HAS GIVEN THE PARTY A GOOD BOOST IN ITS UPHILL FIGHT FOR A VICTORY IN THE UPCOMING ELECTION.

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PAGE 02 DUBLIN 00402 01 OF 02 221721Z

3. PARTY LEADER JACK LYNCH DOMINATED THE PROCEEDINGS AND GAVE WHAT OBSERVERS CALLED THE BEST SPEECH OF HIS LIFE. HE BROKE NO NEW GROUND, WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF A VAGUELY WORDED STATEMENT ON NORTHERN IRELAND WHICH PROMISED, IF ELECTED, "NEW DISCUSSIONS" WITH THE BRITISH UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE UN OR FRIENDLY COUNTRIES. HE SAID THAT A "UNITED NATIONS INTERVENTION"

IN THE NORTH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED. IN REGARD TO CHANGING THE IRISH CONSTITUTION TO INFLUENCE THE NORTHERN SITUATION, HE SAID THAT A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY OF THE ENTIRE ISLAND SHOULD BE NECESSARY. (COMMENT: HE WAS STRONGLY CRITICIZED BY THE IRISH TIMES FOR THIS APPROACH, WHICH WOULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF PUTTING OFF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE INDEFINITELY).

4. LYNCH MADE A BELATED APPEARANCE (HE HAS HAD AN OPERATION FOLLOWED BY FLU, AND MISSED THE FIRST DAY OF THE ARD-FHEIS), BUT FROM THE GENUINE ENTHUSIASM IT WAS APPARENT THAT HE HAS NO SERIOUS PROBLEM IN RETAINING HIS LEADERSHIP, AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTION. HOWEVER, THE ARD-FHEIS DEMONSTRATED THAT THE RANK AND FILE ARE NOT TO BE CLOSELY CONTROLLED. LYNCH HAD TO BACK OFF FROM AN IMPORTANT RESOLUTION WHICH WOULD HAVE GIVEN HIM THE AUTHORITY TO NAME CANDIDATES IN SOME CONSTITUENCIES. THIS WAS DESIGNED TO PUT FORTH A FEW NEW AND ATTRACTIVE CANDIDATES AND COULD HAVE BEEN A MAJOR FACTOR IN SWINGING A CLOSE ELECTION. IT WAS APPARENT FROM THE BEGINNING, THOUGH, THAT THE LOCAL CADRES WOULD NOT GIVE UP THEIR PEROGATIVES AND LYNCH'S AUTHORITY TO NAME CANDIDATES WAS LIMITED BY GIVING A VETO TO THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE, MADE UP OF OLD-TIME PARTY FUNCTIONARIES.

5. IF LYNCH WAS THE STAR, TWO LESSER LUMINARIES SHONE QUITE BRIGHTLY ALSO. FRIDAY NIGHT WAS ALL CHARLIE HAUGHEY'S NIGHT, AND HE GAVE AN IMPRESSIVE SPEECH
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PAGE 03 DUBLIN 00402 01 OF 02 221721Z

FOLLOWED BY A HALF-HOUR INTERVIEW ON THE COUNTRY'S SINGLE TV CHANNEL. SATURDAY, UNTIL LYNCH'S ARRIVAL IN THE EVENING, WAS GEORGE COLLEY'S DAY, AND HE MADE THE MOST OF IT. BOTH OF THESE SATRAPS HAVE LARGE, LOYAL FACTIONS IN THE PARTY, AND BOTH WILL FIGHT BITTERLY FOR THE ACCESSION WHEN LYNCH LEAVES. HAUGHEY IS PROBABLY THE ABLE OF THE TWO, BUT HE HAS THE UNFORTUNATE CHARACTERISTIC OF MAKING ENEMIES ALMOST AS FAST AS HE MAKES FRIENDS.

6. THE PRECISELY EVEN EXPOSURE OF HAUGHEY AND COLLEY WAS NO ACCIDENT, BUT ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE DEFT MANAGEMENT OF GENERAL SECRETARY SEAMUS BRENNAN. THIS YOUNG MAN, NOT YET THIRTY, A RECENT IV GRANTEE, RAN A BEAUTIFULLY ORGANIZED CONVENTION. THE WHOLE EVENT WENT LIKE CLOCKWORK, THE ONLY SETBACK BEING THE WATERING DOWN OF THE RESOLUTION DESCRIBED ABOVE. THIS RESOLUTION WAS A KEY FACTOR IN BRENNAN'S VERY DETAILED ELECTION STRATEGY. HE TOLD AN EMBOFF AFTERWARDS THAT IT WAS A DISAPPOINTMENT, BUT HE HAD

OTHER WAYS TO FIELD BETTER CANDIDATES. ONE OF THEM IS THE TAKEOVER OF KEY LOCALS (CUMANN) BY THE BURGEONING YOUTH MOVEMENT. BRENNAN HAS BUILT A MOST IMPRESSIVE YOUTH MOVEMENT IN THE PARTY, WHICH WAS MUCH IN EVIDENCE AT THE ARD-FHEIS.

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PAGE 01 DUBLIN 00402 02 OF 02 221711Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DUBLIN 402

7. COMMENT: THIS LARGEST-EVER-IN-IRELAND POLITICAL CONVENTION WAS A GREAT SUCCESS, AS SUCH AFFAIRS GO, AND GIVES THE PARTY A MUCH-NEEDED BOOST. IT DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF LIFE IN THE OLD PARTY YET, THOUGH PEOPLE HAVE BEEN CALLING IT ANACHRONISTIC FOR YEARS. HOWEVER, THE VERY ENTHUSIASM OF THE PARTY SPIRIT -- IT WAS LIKE A LAYING-ON OF HANDS--MASKS A CERTAIN POVERTY OF PROGRAMS. ON ALL MAJOR ISSUES THE PARTY HAS A RATHER BLURRY POSITION. FOR INSTANCE, ON CONTRA-CEPTION SYNCH MERELY PROMISED THAT "WE WILL LEGISLATE TO EFFECTIVELY CONTROL THEIR DISTRIBUTION". SKEPTICS AFTERWARDS COULD NOT FIGURE OUT FROM THE STATEMENT WHETHER HE WAS FOR OR AGAINST THEIR DISTRIBUTION. IN MANY OTHER FIELDS THE PARTY MERELY ATTACKS THE COALITION AND STATES THAT IT COULD DO BETTER. ITS ECONOMIC POLICY CANNOT STAND VERY CLOSE SCRUTINY, AS IT PROMISES MUCH BUT DOES NOT REVEAL WHERE THE REVENUE WOULD COME FROM. HOWEVER, ELECTIONS IN IRELAND ARE NOT WON ON POLICIES, BUT RATHER ON A TANGLED WEB OF HISTORY, FAMILY LOYALTIES, PERSONALITIES, CANVASSING, THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY, AND EVEN SUCH THINGS AS THE WEATHER ON ELECTION DAY. FIANNA FAIL'S DEMONSTRATED ENTHUSIASM, AND SUPERIOR ORGANIZATION, WILL

BE MAJOR FACTORS AS IT TRIES TO REGAIN ITS OLD MAJORITY.

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PAGE 02 DUBLIN 00402 02 OF 02 221711Z

ALTHOUGH THE COALITION APPEARS TO BE AHEAD IN THE
ELECTION STAKES AT THE MOMENT, WE ARE TAKING NO BETS. CURLEY

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
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Executive Order: GS
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TAGS: PINT, EI, FIANNA
To: STATE
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